

FROM THE FIELD

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Respected Kaka,

It has been long since I talked to you last. I have been missing you for sometime now and wanted to call you but ever since the team left, Perun has been very sick with high fever and I could not leave his bedside. He is much better today and is playing outside.

How have you been? You must be waiting to hear about the documentation. On the whole they have not done a bad job, but could have done better.

I also feel that this documentation could have been done on a much smaller budget. There is no sense in using U-matic for such long time outdoor documentation of live events. The VHS video recording is economical both in terms of money and time. Anyway, most of the events barring a few that were available during their stay have been documented.

In terms of research work, I have got some very interesting data. Besides the agricultural cycle, migration cycle, ritual cycle and daily life, I have managed to comprehend some abstract concepts related to space and time.

I have some interesting details to show that horizontal space represented by 8×4 *mandala*, symbolises Parvati, female body, womb and earth, and the vertical space, symbolizing the male body, is represented by 3 or *Triloka* (3 worlds) which further contain 7 *Loka* above the earth and 7 below the earth. 84 is a complete number. It includes both the dimensions, of the vertical / male and horizontal / female space, as well as the third dimension of time. Well, please do not begin to smile. It is just loud thinking.

$8 \times 4 = 32$ represents the *mandala* of the earth. Female womb has eight doors and 4 sides. The female body has 32 doors. The mother's milk has 32 streams. Whereas the vertical body is always divided into three parts. Growth of the seed has three stages. The human body has three parts. The primal image of the vertical space, the *arbour mundi* or the *axis mundi* has three parts. The vertical structure of the house has three parts. The earth has three layers, each made of a horizontal and a vertical plane. Earth is horizontal, *Kailashis* vertical, and lotus flowers horizontal, Vasuki, the snake is vertical, The flat stone is horizontal, the white bull is vertical. There is also a tripartite vertical dimension to the creation of the earth. But more interesting is that horizontal and the vertical always must come together. Horizontal, the earth, is the bottom part of the vertical axis, as well as the support to the vertical.

If you remember, the selection of the site for the house is also done according to the principle : $area \times 3 \div 8 - 1$.

Furthermore, 84 is not only a conjunction of two complete numbers 8 and 4 or a $7 \times 3 \times 4$ model, but also a number that represents life on the horizontal plane. Bharmani's private garden / grove, the female space by Shiva's intervention becomes all male space when 84 *siddhas* are established there in the *lingam* form, and Bharmani is forced to leave the place. However, her symbolic presence is a must, there can be no *lingam* without the *jalhairi* so she gives her space to *Lakhna*, the *Vidhi Mata* who not only accords fate and age but also sees to the growth of the seed into a fully formed body. Her *sriyantra* helps

ease labour. To come back to 84, we have 84 *siddhas*, the initial number of sheep given to the Gaddi is 84. There are 84 mountain ranges, there are 84 deities in the sky. The astrological calendar comprises 12 months, 24 fortnights, 27 asterisms, 9 planets and 12 zodiac signs. Together they add up to 84. The vertical 3x7 and horizontal four quarters of the earth yield a sum total of 84. 84 represents not only the solar and the lunar cycle, the 7 fold world and the earth with its four corners but also symbolizes the *Kalchakra* of 84 forms of existence.

The time both defines and is defined by a prescribed code of conduct, order, duty, *dharma*, you have any number of synonyms. The cosmic and the temporal both are maintained, because each being and thing has been assigned a duty i.e. a rhythm to follow and maintain one's rhythm, as well be part of the universal rhythm. To exist is to perform one's duty. Order is maintained through adherence to one's duty, The gradual deviance from duty/rhythm results in *yug parivartan* when order collapses the dissolution follows. Each *yuga* is defined by and defines the moral conduct and social relations. This represents both the cosmic as well as the social *chakra*.

The *ritu chakra* has two aspects to it : The dry and the wet spell. The wet spell is the beginning of a new life, the germination of the seed, sprouting, growth and flowering, from infant stage to full maturity. After gaining maturity there is no further growth but only decay. The dry spell is non-fertile in certain terms, but in other ways it is considered healthy. The wet spell starts with spring and lasts till autumn. The wet is fertile, young, and immature. It is conceptualized as unripened / immatured state (*kacchi*) not good for health, excess of *rasa* weakens the blood and causes loss of vigour. However, this is not in absolute terms. I shall explain this later.

Rasa (conceptualized as fecund waters coming from the woman) *rakta* (blood) and *pitta* (bile) are three essential ingredients of the body. Any physical illness is caused by disturbing the balance between these three. Since 'wet' spell has excess of *rasa* and is cold from within (compare it to the womb) it causes imbalance by mixing with the blood. However on the other hand, it is only this *rasa* in the womb which is capable of holding the seed and providing the ground for germination. The female menstruation is called *phul phali*(Flowering) and the female is said to be unripe (*kacchi*) during this period. This is the time when the womb is believed to be getting rid of the bad blood and cleaning the *rasa* inside so that the seed may germinate. The *kacchi ritu* begins to turn into *pakki* (mature) by the end of the month of *bhadron*. The harvest ripens. This is the mature state, there is no growth hereafter, only decay. Autumn (*Hairi / Asuj*) is the season of harvest. At this stage *rasa* gradually starts to decrease, turning into fat. The blood increases, making the body healthy.

Winter is dry, cold from outside, hot from within. It is dry, hot, healthy but, nothing germinates. When Shiva returns on *shivrat* (return of the primal seed. I'll explain it later), a battle takes place between the *daini* (witches) and the demons. Victory of the *daini*, female power over the demons (dry, non-fertile period) in this battle ensures good harvest for the next season. So *shivratri* is the night, when Shiva is to bring back life to earth, its wet female beginning. He is, needless to say, on the side of the *daini*. He joins in the fight against the dry, non-fertile spell (by combining the male principle with the female) in order to regenerate and rejuvenate the fecundity of the earth. (Later I shall tell you about some interesting details from the *Gaddi Shiv Puran*.)

When the wet season starts everything sprouts, the seed germinates. The biological growth of the body which starts as a male seed embedded in the female womb, grows inside the female waters, and after birth feeds on 32 streams of female milk. 32 indicates the completion of growth. After the age of 32 the mother's milk exhausts. However it was this *rasa* that guaranteed growth. Separation from the female beginnings on the one hand indicates maturity, on the other hand it involves a gradual decay or at least a period of non-growth.

Thus in spatial terms what goes into and what comes out of the earth is upward moving, active vertical principle. In temporal terms it signifies completion of a cycle, the end product which when removed from horizontal spatial dimension symbolizes all male, dry, non fertile seed incapable of germination. The 32

square *mandala* of the earth with the nine streams of water from above falling on the *Sumeru Parvat*, Kailash in the middle of the earth drawn during the ritual ceremony of *Nuala* encapsulates both the spatial and the temporal. Together they represent the complete macrocosm which is 84 (*chaurasi*). 84 is the number of Shiva, who contains within him both the female and male principle on the one hand and the spatial and temporal dimension on the other. I hope I don't sound too much off the mark.

Besides working on these categories, I have done some good recording of the *Gaddi Shiv Puran*. One of the recordings lasts about 34 hours.

I must stop here and keep something for Delhi. I seek your blessings and of course I am leaving Bharmour on the 10th.

Take care.

With lots of love and respect.

Molly Kaushal

New Delhi

4 October 1996

Dear Molly

Your letter has reached this afternoon. Meanwhile we have spoken on phone. I reiterate, if Perun continues to be sick, return to Delhi at once. I pray for his quick and complete recovery and hope by now he is again rejoicing excellent health.

For a mother researcher it is frightening to be away in the field with a child lying low by sickness. I hope you have recorded Gaddi's response to this event. I recall my experience of falling sick in a Munda village infected by smallpox. Those people watched over me anxiously and offered for my recovery a cock-sacrifice. Oh, it is very unkind of me to say all this to you. I admire your courage to do fieldwork with one-and-a-half year old baby in arms. I am moved by your patience (determination) to stay in the field, even when the baby is sick. But I ask myself : Is an intellectual life everything? To be a truly human, mind and heart must go hand in hand.

I am pleased to hear that our documentation team has done fairly well. I appreciate your concern for inexpensive recording. But the long-term gain of U-matic is undeniable. What is eventually important is not the hours of documentation but the years of preservation of what has been documented. Tell me, was it really difficult to take a photograph of the people, their deities and rituals? During my fieldwork in 'tribal' areas photography was never an easy task. There is a belief that one shortens ones own life when one allows a photograph to be taken. As you know, in our Brahdishvara temple project, the photo documentation of rituals performed in the sanctum sanctorum was refused.

Your observation on the Gaddi notion of space, time and number has given me unspeakable pleasure

and pride. Let me share with you how I look at these terms.

The modern science conception of space, time and number is vastly different from what your Gaddis claim. For us, it is not the contrast which matters. What we are concerned with is the inner tradition of the Gaddi's emerging from a system of knowledge which I call sacred science. The metaphors of sacred science which you have recorded are not peculiar to Gaddis; they are meaningful to indigenous peoples all over the world

For traditional societies, space is divided into two models : the perceptible space and the invisible space. The visible form exists with its invisible potential. With your vision you see a Gaddi sitting on the Bharmour Kailash, but in his image and awareness he is sitting on the invisible Kailash of Shiva. The two Kailash's are in fact identical. The invisible Kailash is not illusion. Rather the two together constitute the reality. In other words, there is no extra space or a celestial Kailash separated from the earthly Kailash.

Space and time are related. Traditional societies divide existence into three realms : the unborn (or the heavenly realm), the living (or the earthly realm) and the dead (or the nether realm). Man's relationship with these three is primarily temporal : through time (ordinal duration of existence) and space (ordinal location of existence). As you know, in these societies a place on the earth is always measured by how long it takes to get there. In the traditional vision, the Sun, the Moon and Stars are in space; and time is determined by the powers of these spaces, that is, the position of the Sun, the Moon, the Stars, and the cycle of the seasons. The realms of existence are related to the eternal aspect of time, through the cycles of birth, growth and decline.

I deeply appreciate your quest for understanding the Gaddi cultural tradition in terms of number. For us, the students of human science, mathematics is a part of culture. Our concern is with the cultural conception of number, in which case it is not always certain that $2+2 = 4$. For instance 2 (Hindu priests) +2 (Christian priests) do not really (effectively) make 4 priests in either case. By using mathematical formulas modern science makes objective generalization about physical truth. The sacred science also makes numeric and geometric formulations. But, unlike modern science, it contains inherent reflections of the metaphysical reality and the sacred principles of creativity. As it appears from your letter, 84 is the sacred (cardinal) number for the Gaddis. They play with this number in a manner that appears to us as natural number but in reality they follow the number symbolism of their cultural system. You have correctly stated that 84 is a complete number. But remember, it is also a complete world : 84 *siddhas* (in the *lingam* form), 84 sheep (given to Gaddis), 84 deities (in the sky), 84 mountain ranges (on the earth), and 84 forms of existence. The critical number 84 stands true for both space and time. As you have shown, their astrological calendar, comprising months, fortnight, asterisms, planets and zodiac signs, make a sum total of 84. The solar and lunar cycles also represent 84. It is not surprising that much of what you have shown in terms of number ranges ultimately to the three layers (realms) of existential reality, each having a horizontal plane and a vertical plane. You have rightly indicated association of this well-chosen symbol with human body (microcosm).

Finally, let me remind you once again that the sacred number is not natural number and the sacred geometry is not actual space. But it is the notion of the sacred number and the sacred geometry that makes people realize the necessary or absolute truth.

Understanding is a very difficult art. Is it not so, my dearest child?

Share my love with Perun.

Baidyanath Saraswati